

Animals - Plovers

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Duxbury Clipper

Piping Plovers Back in Duxbury

The first Piping Plovers have taken up residence at Duxbury Beach this spring in preparation for the upcoming nesting season when they know the welcome mat will be out for their annual ritual.

Coastal Waterbird protection programs have been in place for quite a while in Duxbury thanks to local efforts and the leadership of Scott Hecker, a Duxbury resident and Director of the Coastal Waterbird Program at the Mass. Audubon Society.

The number of the once globally threatened piping plovers has greatly increased in Massachusetts from 126 nesting pairs in 1987 to 495 pairs in 1998.

Hecker said one of the real

reasons for the comeback is that the plovers' nests have been protected from off-road vehicles in the past few years on a number of area beaches.

Local waterbird program officials including Duxbury's Ryan Chandler monitor the birds and their chicks keeping people, dogs and vehicles from coming within 200 yards of the nests. Beach patrol personnel explain the reasons to beachgoers.

Nesting areas are clearly posted on Duxbury Beach and the bay.

The tiny sand-colored bird, which has been on the federal endangered species list since 1986, makes its home along the Atlantic Coast mainly on

beaches that are flat and have little vegetation.

Hecker said that efforts must continue since their population is still up to only 60 percent of what it will take to get them off the endangered species list. Hecker joined Audubon's Coastal Waterbird Program in May 1987. Twelve years later the program has a full time director, 12-part time and seasonal employees and more than 100 volunteers.

Harbormaster Don Beers is proud of Duxbury's track record in coastal waterbird protection. "We maintain an excellent balance here and it's working," he said. "Shorebirds and beachgoers can peacefully co-exist."